



**Office of the Attorney General
Paul G. Summers**

**Department of Commerce and Insurance
Commissioner Paula Flowers**

CONSUMER ALERT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 6, 2006

#06-06

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Attorney General Cautions Seniors About Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Scams

Attorney General Paul G. Summers today urged Tennessee seniors to watch out for Medicare Rx Drug Plan scams. The announcement comes as National Consumer Protection Week kicks off today to help consumers spot potential scams.

The Medicare-Part D Prescription Drug Benefit began Jan. 1, 2006. Every Medicare recipient, regardless of income or health status, will have access to the Prescription Drug Benefit.

“Tennesseans should check the facts before buying prescription drug discount cards offered by private companies to avoid paying for empty promises and unscrupulous attempts to steal your identifying information” Attorney General Summers said. “Seniors and those who care for seniors need to know how to identify the legitimate approved Medicare Prescription Drug providers.

Attorney General Summers offers the following tips to avoid Medicare Rx Drug Plan scams:

***New scams have been reported where seniors are contacted either by telephone or in person by someone offering to sell a benefit card.** If someone says you must join or you will lose your other Medicare benefits, it is a scam.

***Check the list of Medicare-approved prescription drug plans. The list of approved plans**

and other information about the program are available at www.medicare.gov and by calling toll-free, 1-800-633-4227 (TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.) Medicare prescription drug plans, which are offered by private companies and organizations, must meet specific federal standards and be approved by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

***Guard your personal information from identity thieves posing as sales people. Legitimate plans may ask for your Social Security number, but only when you are actually enrolling. And they may only ask for your credit card or bank account information if you are arranging to make automatic payments for your drug coverage from that account.**

***Know the law on how Medicare prescription drug plans can be marketed.** It is illegal for companies or organizations marketing Medicare drug plans to come to your door uninvited or to send you unsolicited e-mails. Companies and organizations can call to promote their drug plans, but it's illegal for them to sign people up during those calls. They must also obey telemarketing laws because it is illegal to call: before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m.; people whose telephone numbers are on a state or the federal "do not call" registry (with some exceptions); or people who have asked not to be called again. For more information about your telemarketing rights and to put your phone number on the federal "do not call" registry, go to www.donotcall.gov or call 1-888-382-1222. To place your number on Tennessee's "do not call" registry, contact the Tennessee Regulatory Authority at 1-877-872-7030 or online at www.tennessee.gov/tra.

***Medicare prescription drug plans should come with no strings attached.** Companies and organizations can offer modest prizes or gifts (but not cash) to promote their Medicare prescription drug plans, but it is illegal to require anyone to join a drug plan in order to get a prize or gift.

***Do not be fooled by sales materials that look like they are from the government.** Only private companies are offering the plans, not government agencies.

***Report suspected Medicare drug plan scams. Call the Office of Inspector General at the Department of Health and Human Services, 1-800-447-8477, TTY 1-800-337-4950** (information about the Medicare drug plans is not available at these numbers). You can also report Medicare-related fraud by sending an email to HHSTips@oig.hhs.gov or [writing to Inspector General, HHS, Attention: Hotline, 330 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20201.](mailto:writing.to.inspector.general@hhs.gov)

Attorney General Summers cautioned, "Never give out personal identifying information, medical or financial, unless you know who you are talking to and are sure that the company is approved by Medicare." Consumers may file a complaint regarding any unfair and deceptive practice with the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs by calling (615) 741-4737 or toll free at 1-800-342-8385 or online www.state.tn.us/consumer.